

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR
March 1980

COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE AT THE *TIME*

by Tom Bethell

I was glad to see that the Center for Ethics and Public Policy in Washington has published its study of foreign intelligence, *The CIA and the American Ethic*, by Ernest Lefever and Roy Godson. I mention this not because I was briefly involved with the project (the Center in the end decided, no doubt wisely, not to use my somewhat subjective and nonacademic contribution), but because, in these times of renewed cold war, the role of the CIA is worth talking about.

My assignment was to examine media coverage of the agency by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the television networks, which was actually relatively simple until about 1971. Thereafter a rather large army of researchers would have been needed to scrutinize, for bias, the square miles of newsprint dedicated to CIA activities, most of them of a seemingly reprehensible nature. In 1975 in particular the *Times* wrote about almost nothing else for weeks on end.

I had hardly bothered to read these stories, beyond glancing at their headlines, when they first came out. It must have been clear to even the drowsiest of readers in the mid-1970s that the then relentless attack on the CIA told us less about the Agency than about the leadership class that had got us into a war, lost it, and then turned on itself in self-disgust.

Some of these newspaper stories may well have been written by bright, eager young journalists who actually believed that by denigrating the CIA they were building a more glorious future for America by improving its moral standing in the world—the Third World in particular. (I have yet to discover where that benighted place is.) Others were possibly written by journalists with less admirable motives, or so I concluded after winding my way through miles of microfilm.

Particularly unappetizing—a journalistic nadir of sorts—was a series in the *New York Times* by John Crewdson in late 1977. Following the lead of Carl Bernstein in *Rolling Stone*, he set out to hunt down various individuals (whose existence, but not identity, had earlier been disclosed by CIA Director William Colby) who had over the years maintained a dual role, working for newspapers while maintaining CIA connections of an unspecified nature. Not KGB connections, mind you. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and, therefore, the television networks preserved an indulgent silence about the KGB throughout the 1970s. No, let's face it, the intent was to inflict the maximum damage on one's own institutions, one's own country—all in the name of the Nobility and Integrity of the Press.

Crewdson (with additional legwork provided by Joseph Treaster) duly tracked down some of our culprits and published their names. But the names of others were not published. The following explanation for this appeared in an unsigned article in the same series. Let us record that the *New York Times* here unashamedly reassumed the mantle of the House Un-American Activities Committee of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Although "a score of these individuals [with CIA ties] have been identified in other articles in this series," the anonymous author wrote, "a dozen others" were not identified because they had "provided information on a confidential basis." In HUAC language, they had cooperated with the inquiry.

I have never met Crewdson and Treaster, and do not for a minute wish to imply that they are anything other than God-fearing, patriotic Americans who pledge allegiance to the flag every morning at the breakfast table. But it would be nice to know that, in recompense for their brief lapse into McCarthyism, they are busily at work on a series dealing with KGB activities in Washington, not excluding the possibility of KGB contacts with news media personnel in recent years. Perhaps they could enlist the covert support of the Soviet embassy in such a project.

Incidentally, it was interesting to read recently the British accounts of the unmasking of Anthony Blount as the "fourth man," assistant to Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, and Soviet spy. The words "traitor" and "treason" were unashamedly used in print, and they somehow jumped off the page when you read them.

It occurred to me that a similar exposure in the U.S. in recent years would not have elicited such harsh epithets. Of course, the "post-Watergate morality," with its "freedom of information" and climate of "openness in government," has made it unnecessary for anyone harboring anti-American or pro-Soviet sentiments to take the uncomfortable step of actually decamping to Moscow. The pages of the *New York Times* and many other newspapers were flung open, so that one was not obliged to defect in the flesh—merely in print. One could take a stand as an upholder of press freedom, a Jeffersonian, not so much a disliker of America as a lover of the First Amendment. Sometimes I think that all the ballyhoo about openness was nothing more than the groundwork for such camouflage.